

DR. WILLIAM M. CURTIS HOUSE
23-25 High Street
Bristol
Hartford County
Connecticut

HABS No. CT-430

HABS
CONN,
2-BRIS,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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Location: 23-25 High Street
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USGS Bristol, Connecticut Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
18.671340.4615350

Significance: The Dr. William M. Curtis House is significant as a representative example of a Queen Anne-style house with a well-preserved exterior and some well-preserved interior spaces, and as a part of the city's well-to-do residential district of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; it is a contributing building in the Federal Hill Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

Description: The exterior displays the irregular plan, massing, and rooflines, and the eclectic detailing, typical of the Queen Anne style. The main body of the house is two-bays wide with a gable front featuring partial cornice returns. There are full-height, cross-gable bays to either side; the left (west) one extends outward, and a shallow, shed-roofed pavilion extends from the face of the right (east) one. The front porch wraps around the entire front elevation to meet the extended side wings. The porch has clustered Tuscan columns, a molded rail on turned balusters, a molded cornice, and, at the southwest corner, a flush-boarded pediment with a cartouche and two medallions. The main entrance door has an upper window over two tiers of raised wooden panels; to the left of the entry is a semi-circular oriel on a conical base of beaded boards. On the west side of the house, the second story of the cross-gabled bay overhangs the first on large, molded brackets; on the first floor is a three-sided oriel with beaded-board base between two radially glazed elliptical lights. The molded frames of

the elliptical lights have four elongated, bracket-like blocks around the periphery. An enclosed stairway has been added to the rear of the house.

The interior has lost all its historic fabric except for the front hall, the living room and the dining room. Separating the living room from both the hall and the dining room are Ionic columns and Ionic corner pilasters (with beaded corners), connected by a low balustrade; the columns and pilasters support a full entablature with a dentil course between the architrave and molded cornice. The main staircase, just inside the main entry, is richly detailed with lincrusta wainscoting, paneling on the wall below the stairs, a molded rail on turned balusters, and a newel post with beaded corners and a rounded cap with floral carvings. Adjacent a small storage niche under the stairs is a mirror frame (the mirror itself is missing) with a smaller version of the entablature found at the room divisions, resting on pilasters with beaded corners. The principal decorative feature of the living room is a large street-facing window with a transom of stained-glass lozenge panes incorporating a central fleur-de-lis motif. In the northwest corner of the dining room stands a fireplace made of water-struck brick; the mantel rests on a cornice consisting of a dentil course over a course of egg-and-dart moldings, and the paneled over-mantel has a molded cornice atop an egg-and-dart course. In the dining room's northeast corner is a built-in cabinet with drawers below a glazed front of interlaced pointed arches; side pilasters with beaded corners support a simple entablature with a denticulated cornice. Both living room and dining room have coffered ceilings, recent wall-to-wall carpeting and wallpaper, and molded baseboards. Other than the picture window, the windows are fitted with two-over-two double-hung sash in simply molded surrounds.

The rest of the interior includes neither ornate decorative treatments resembling those detailed above, nor any built-in features like those in the dining room. Walls are covered with recent wood-composition paneling and floors with linoleum or wall-to-wall carpeting; hollow-core doors are

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typical, and many of the original door and window moldings have been removed or covered.

History:

The house was built in 1905 for Dr. William M. Curtis, a physician who kept his practice in the house as well as living in it with his small family (wife, daughter, and mother-in-law). This dual use as office and residence accounts for the two entries to the house; the main entry, opening into the well-preserved hall and other spaces detailed above, was used by the family, and the side entry by patients.

Curtis, who was born in Bristol to English-born parents, was 25 years old when he married Genevieve Bierce in 1896. He started his career as a general practitioner in an upper-floor office on Bristol's Main Street, and lived in rented quarters nearby. His ability to build this large, stylish residence in 1905 attests to the success of his practice. High Street runs down the southwest flank of Bristol's Federal Hill, the neighborhood occupied by the city's wealthiest residents at the turn of the century. At the corner of High and Main Street, the city built its Classical Revival-style Free Public Library in 1905; at the time, two houses stood between the library and the Curtis House; those houses have since been removed to make parking lots, and the Curtis House now stands adjacent to the library property.

After Curtis died in 1914, his family sold the house to another physician, Alburton A. Dewey, who lived and practiced in the house until his death in 1937. After Dewey's widow sold the house, it was used as a multi-family dwelling. No furniture or fixtures remain from the medical practices once pursued in the house.

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